



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

OUR NEW RACIAL DRAMA

BY HERBERT FRANCIS SHERWOOD

THE Piedmont Plateau in the South is the present stage of a racial drama which has hardly yet been recognized, so quietly and rapidly has the cast been drawn and the action begun. A new social and economic factor has been injected into American life, which may submerge or transform one of the most romantic and heroic race stocks in the United States. Three-quarters of a million of the spare-figured mountaineers, chiefly of Scotch-Irish ancestry, have left their dark one- and two-room log cabins in the mountain "coves" of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia, and are now to be found living in four-room boarded houses in villages and cities, of from one thousand up to thirty and forty thousand population, and working with their hands in cotton mills. So great and so recent is the change in altitude, physical environment, diet, manner of gaining a living, and social relationships, that it is well nigh impossible even in this age of superlatives to find words adequately to measure the gulf separating the abandoned isolated cabins up in the mountains from the rows of neat stucco bungalows found in some of the cotton mill towns scattered along the Piedmont Plateau.

The elements in the drama are so different from those found in any other racial question presented to the American people that one observes it with double interest. Unlike most of our racial problems, it is not one of Americanization. The mountaineers of the Southern Appalachians are no newcomers. They are of stock that has always stood on the frontier of civilization because of its moral fibre and earnestness of conviction. Lineal descendants chiefly are they of those Scottish folk who in the days of James I, following the suppression of the Irish Rebellion in Elizabeth's reign, were transplanted from the Lowlands of Scotland to the North of Ireland. They carried with them the obstinate and hard-fisted religious convictions of Knox and the Cove-

nanTERS. Harassed by English priests and Parliament because of their non-conforming Presbyterianism, they set forth once again. Not less than half a million souls, more than half the Presbyterian population of North Ireland, according to John Fiske, crossed the Atlantic between the years 1730 and 1770. At the outbreak of the Revolution they comprised one-sixth of the population of the American Colonies.

The kind of men they were is indicated by their promulgation of the "Mecklenburg Declaration," and the declaration of the council of mountaineers who met at Abingdon, Virginia, at the junction of the valleys of the Blue Ridge and East Tennessee on January 20, 1775. The latter, in the language of Bancroft, "resolved never to surrender, but to live and die for liberty." It was no tax on tea that stirred them, but the native impulses that had launched them upon the sea on the way to America. They were the rear guard of the Revolution, opposing the onslaughts of the Tory-led Cherokees and capturing supplies of British ammunition. They broke up important campaign plans through such heroic and romantic exploits as the Battle of King's Mountain, in 1780, when 960 militiamen, nearly all of them mountaineers, led by Presbyterian elders, went forth with "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon" and took by storm that natural fortress with its garrison of more than 1100 English soldiers. These free-lance mountain woodsmen, without equipment or hope of monetary recompense, in the words of Jefferson, thus gloriously announced the "turn in the tide of success which terminated the Revolutionary War with the seal of independence". With the notch of King's Mountain on their rifle stocks, they turned about and without a day's rest marched three hundred miles into the wilderness to beat back the threatened descent of the Indians upon the settlements, and accomplished their purpose in one short month at Boyd's Creek. Nor can one forget what they did in the War of 1812 under General Jackson, one of their own kind, against the Indians and at the Battle of New Orleans. The names of "Sam" Houston and "Stonewall" Jackson, and their deeds in the Civil War, proclaim the quality of their blood.

Such is the stock which furnishes the new Southern social and

economic factor. Pressed back into the sequestered folds of the mountains, and sealed in by differences in temperament between themselves and the planters on the coastal plain, they became more and more isolated. Their segregation was so complete that a negro was a curiosity to many of them. This is no problem of color. Their isolation has reflected upon their psychology as a race. Money largely disappeared. A family might come into possession of ten or fifteen dollars in the course of a year. Business was conducted by barter. In the clearings around the one- and two-room cabins were kept a few animals, including perhaps a horse, hogs, and one or two cows. Sufficient grass, corn, cotton and tobacco were raised to furnish food and clothing for the family and solace for the solitude of the mountains. Their rifles added variety to the larder. Corn whiskey, or "moonshine", made for their own use, furnished spice. With no accessible schools, illiteracy became the rule. Their inherent qualities were dulled, but their instinct for religion and their inclination to hospitality were preserved through the obstinacy of their nature.

Through a period of one hundred and fifty years they have been habituating themselves to the wild, free life of the huntsman, living from hand to mouth in a literal sense. Only one-fifth of the Southern mountaineers, until recently, lived in communities of one thousand or more population. They are proudly independent and high-spirited, and, strange as it may seem when one recalls the large families reared in the one-room abodes, comparatively free from immorality.

When the expansion of American industry led to the location of factories in the neighborhood of the sources of raw material, the eyes of producers of cotton textiles were turned toward the cotton fields of the Carolinas and the western slopes of the Appalachians in East Tennessee. Erection of manufacturing plants in new regions had been made possible by the discovery of processes and the invention of machinery which were so nearly automatic and foolproof in their operation that unskilled labor could take the place of skilled workers. The rushing tide of alien peasantry seeking to improve their economic status furnished the workers required in New England and the Middle

States. But to the Carolinas there came few aliens. They were not greatly desired, and racial conditions in the South acted as a further deterrent. The red-soiled rivers flowing down from the mountains and crossing the Piedmont Plateau would furnish the water power and the essential humidity for spinning. But where were the workers to come from? Negroes could not be employed for the mechanical operations. They were not only required on the plantation, but there were other obstacles. Up in the mountains was an abundant labor supply, if it could be mobilized. While the adults with fixed notions and fingers stiffened by years of hunting and handling of the hoe could not catch up and splice together the broken strands passing through the spinning frames, there were the large families of mountaineer children whose nimble fingers could. So factories were erected on the banks of the ruddy rivers, and four-room houses were constructed around them by the textile companies to house the workers. Company stores were provided to supply their various wants. Villages rose where before no structures had broken the sloping contour of the country.

Then the employment agents went up into the mountains. They followed the trails back into the hamlets and to the isolated cabins in search of recruits for the spindles and the looms. They peered into the gloomy shadows of the log shelters, illuminated in winter by the fire in a crude stone fireplace and in summer by small shuttered rectangular openings in the walls. How could families of ten or a dozen find space to grow up in such quarters? They stopped outside in the clearing and discussed employment with the head of the household.

"You've got only one room here," they would argue. "We can give you a fine, boarded, four-room house with glass in the windows, ground around it for a garden, and a shelter for a cow. It'll be a short 'piece' from your work. You don't have much money up here. If you come down to the mill you can earn a dollar a day. The children can work, too. They'll bring in more money in a week than you see here in a year. We'll see that you get down all right. If you'll be at the railroad station on Wednesday, I'll meet you there with some of your neighbors and all will go down on the train together."

Many thought they would go down and try it. They argued to themselves that they could come back again—in fact, they would, as soon as they had saved up some money. Possessed of the old notion that their children were their personal property until the age of twenty-one, the possibility of gaining money through the toil of their offspring strongly appealed to them. (Indeed, this feeling of the mountaineers regarding their children added to the difficulty of eliminating child labor.)

Thus opened the social and economic drama for one of America's sturdiest races. Child labor had become a fact; eight-, nine- and ten-year old youngsters were supporting families unaccustomed to the cramped quarters of a town. While the weekly rent was only 25 cents a room, and only a moderate amount of fuel was required for heating, yet somehow the money was never available for the return to the mountains. There were the deductions from the wages at the company store for supplies of food and clothing purchased. Poverty may have been the curse of the mountains, but life in a closely packed community has a price that must be paid. No one gets something for nothing.

There have been changes of other kinds. The survivors of the children who toiled in the mills in the earlier days now have children of their own, either in the mills or approaching the working age. The latter is not the early age it was when the Southern textile industry was started. The States in which child labor was prevalent, and the mill operators, have inquired into the matter and taken action. In South Carolina, for instance, education is compulsory. No child may work in a mill under fourteen years of age. Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, only those who measure up to certain educational and physical standards may work. Their work day is limited to eight hours. For those over sixteen, the legal limit is ten hours. Child labor is disappearing.

The effect of changed environment on human beings accustomed to primitive conditions has manifested itself, as might be expected. To the alteration in diet are charged many of the cases of pellagra which occurred in the South a few years ago. When it broke out in the cotton mill villages it was supposed to have originated from the eating of rotten corn meal. Among the

poor, it was known as "the corn bread disease". It was later considered a form of starvation, due to unbalanced diet from which the protein and vitamins, through ignorance, had been omitted. The simple mountain folk, accustomed to a dietary of milk, vegetables, game, and other natural products of the mountains, and altogether ignorant of food values and proper methods of cooking, fell into the habit of eating along the line of least resistance, food most easily and quickly prepared.

The abandonment of the ancestral home in the mountains, the breaking of the ties of the past, the parting from century-old traditions and habits of living, have left them footloose. They are wanderers from mill to mill, from company house to company house, their furniture, often bought on the instalment plan, gradually disintegrating. They are so close to their past that no new traditions or customs have been developed and few anchors put down. The war, however, with its high rates of pay, opened the door for those whose instincts were toward stabilization. The workers, for the first time in their lives, were in a position to save money. Some did this. With the aid of building and loan associations, which sprang up in the larger places, they began building houses for themselves.

A large proportion, however, of the mountaineer workers live in houses owned by the companies that employ them. In not a few cases, the entire village where the mill is located is the property of the mill company. The more progressive mill men have sought to bring about stability of their working forces and contentment by the development of special housing and social facilities. Model villages have been erected. One such near the boundary line between North and South Carolina, in addition to the usual stores, churches and schoolhouses, includes a Y.M.C.A., a Y.W.C.A., a Community House, an auditorium fitted with motion picture apparatus, and playgrounds furnished with gymnastic and athletic equipment. The objection is that one man or group of men controls the whole community, economically and socially.

Many other mill men have provided some of these facilities. There is a tendency to meet the demand for better houses, or at least to offer more attractive dwelling places to the workers as a

means of stabilization. In one South Carolina city, most attractive looking, one story stucco bungalows, enclosed to the ground, are being erected by a mill company to rent at fifty cents a room, weekly. They front on an asphalt paved street and have concrete sidewalks in front. Most of the older company houses are erected on brick pillars and are open underneath. The rent and the bill for household supplies at the Company's store are deducted from the pay envelope. The wages range from eight to fourteen dollars a week according to the work.

Will the workers of the new generation of the mountaineers, who are better acquainted with village life and industrial labor than they are with the mountain environment of their parents, add to the complex social problem so closely interwoven with massed production? It is difficult to answer the question. In other parts of the country, the existence of a mechanical industry of the proportion of the textile industry in the South—approximately one-third of the cotton textiles of the country are produced below Mason and Dixon's line—has led to organization of workers and to unrest. Will it be the same in the Piedmont district? Will the adaptation to the new environment be evolutionary or revolutionary? There have been sporadic labor disturbances, but how far they are symptomatic, remains to be demonstrated.

In the mean time, there is an opportunity to utilize industrial experience gained elsewhere toward making the process evolutionary. Certain Southern educators have been thinking about ways of developing an educated leadership among the mountaineers, a leadership which will include mill administrators as well as clergymen and social workers. A difficulty encountered is that of bringing educational facilities and the ambitious, socially-minded mountaineer together. For a century, poverty has cursed the mountaineers. Life in the mill has not brought surcease from the ills of poverty. Spending as fast as they earn in their hospitable way, having in general little appreciation of the value of education, and bound together by filial affection and a sense of responsibility on the part of the children and a belief in property rights in childhood on the part of the parents, it has proved difficult to develop a sufficiently strong desire for training to bring

about a temporary sacrifice of earnings and a direct expenditure of money for the purpose of acquiring an education.

In the effort to overcome this obstacle, Dr. D. E. Camak, a Methodist preacher of Scotch-Irish stock, started eleven years ago in Spartanburg, South Carolina, a school which should furnish opportunities for earning and learning simultaneously. Through co-operation with progressive neighboring mill men he set in operation a plan whereby students could work in the mill a week and study a week. In this way they were enabled to earn enough to meet all personal expenses and the cost of their education. This plan was a test of quality, for only the ambitious and capable would undertake the work of the school under such conditions. None under sixteen years of age were admitted. The average age of the students is twenty-two years. Only a small number of them in the past have had more than a few months' schooling, prior to admission, as they have been obliged to work since childhood, or have spent their earlier years in the mountains where there were no schools.

In the course of the ten years of its existence upwards of 1,000 students, from eight Southern States, have passed through this school. In order to assure its students the highest type of textile training in addition to schooling, and at the same time increase their opportunities for earning their way through school, the institution, now known as the Textile Industrial Institute, has erected a model mill in which all the processes are carried on from the raw material to the finished cloth, dyed and mercerized, ready for cutting up into garments. There is no other school like it, or apparently which so fully meets the need. It is through a trained, Christianized group of mill foremen and superintendents, understanding the experiences and needs of the mountaineer workers, that the Institute sees a way of guiding this great army along sane evolutionary channels.

Thus a great American racial, social and industrial drama is being enacted on the Piedmont Plateau, with an unrivaled opportunity of applying the lessons of experience and avoiding some of the unhappy mistakes of the past.

HERBERT FRANCIS SHERWOOD.